

'Stonewall'
Bedford
hold out

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 0, Bedford Town 0

STONEWALL Bedford got the result they wanted at Loakes Park on Saturday when they held Wycombe Wanderers to a goalless draw in the first round of the F.A. Cup.

And in a game where chances were limited to just a handful throughout 90 minutes, Wanderers must be kicking themselves for not sewing this up at the first attempt and making the trip to Third Division Cardiff in round two. They had three good scoring opportunities to Bedford's one — but all three went unaccepted.

Bedford were everything we expected. Dedicated to defence, strong and competitive, hard-working and highly experienced. By playing four men in midfield, they succeeded in snuffing out many Wycombe raids while the back four did all that was asked of them. They were content to sound out the home side in the first half but looked far more dangerous in the second when they threw more men forward. They too found scoring immensely difficult, however. John Delaney and Keith Mead were towers of strength in the middle while John Maskell had only a couple of saves to make — one of them amongst the best of his illustrious career.

Despite the hurly-burly of midfield, Terry Reardon emerged from the game with great credit and deserved to be on a winning side while Geoff Anthony caused Bedford a good deal of trouble early on before he was given some hard treatment by the visitors defence.

But overall, Wanderers must have been disappointed with their performance. It was obvious before a ball was kicked this would be a dour struggle between two good defences but even so, Wycombe should have created more opportunities for

themselves — and what's more important — should have accepted at least one of the three that came their way.

Despite all the injury scares in mid-week, the Blues were at full strength with the exception of Ray Eaton. Dave Bullock was preferred to Dave Alexander at right-back, also providing cover for Maskell in goal. Bullock did well in the first half but allowed little Peter Hawkins far too much room in the second. Bedford fielded the side that held Southern League leaders and champions Wimbledon to the same scoreline seven days earlier.

Both sides showed signs of nerves in front of a 4,000 crowd early on, but Wanderers were first to settle and began to probe the Bedford defence. Leo Markham, who began his football at Marlow, took responsibility of marking Delaney at set pieces but lost the battle after eight minutes when John headed a free kick through to Tony Horseman. 'Bodger' just failed to get a touch from close range.

Veteran full-back Dave Skinn, who like Norman Cooley, Horseman and Maskell, played in the epic F.A. Cup matches between these two sides nine years ago, gave goalkeeper Ray Peacock an anxious moment in the 15th minute when he chested the ball down and almost found his own net, but the first of Wanderers three chances came two minutes later.

This was made by Paul Birdseye. He picked up a clearance and cut infield, beating three defenders in a swerving run. Spotting Mick Holifield unmarked, he laid the ball off perfectly into his path but Mick was fractionally off target and found the side netting. He has scored many fine goals from exactly the same position but it was not to be on Saturday.

The first 20 minutes were spent almost entirely inside Bed-

ford territory as Wanderers pressed strongly for an early goal. Reardon set up numerous promising attacks but all too regularly they broke down when reaching Dylan Evans, whose control was unpredictable.

Maskell was brought into action for the first time when he fielded an awkward shot by Markham but the game became rather scrappy before half-time with midfield battling it out and the two defences returning anything that came their way.

It was in first half injury time that Wanderers had their second golden chance.

Anthony was awarded a free kick after being brought down and his flighted cross was met by Delaney at the far post. It was the centre-half's only clear header and he got this effort on target. Peacock, however, dived full length to parry the ball which was hastily booted clear.

Bedford's boss must have had a few words to say during the break for his team came out with far more confidence in the second half and seemed to believe they could win the game without the need of a replay. Hawkins moved forward much more while hot-shot Gary Sargent, although well shackled by the two central defenders, was always lurking dangerously. Next to him was former sprint champion Peter Phillips — ready to cash in on any one against one situation.

It was Hawkins who had Bedford's one and only chance — in the 47th minute. He left Bullock standing on the flank but was brought down on the edge of the box. Dave Earl sent the free kick to the six yard line when Hawkins ran in and powered a header goalwards. From such short range, Maskell didn't seem to have a chance, but by pure reflex, he arched up and somehow tipped the ball over the bar — a miraculous save and one that Hawkins could hardly believe. He stood awestruck for 20 seconds and then told the goalkeeper "You must have arms three feet long!" Certainly it was one of John's best ever.

It was soon afterwards that referee Robinson played a key role in the game with two debatable decisions. The first was after 56 minutes when he halted Wycombe's best move of the match. Evans and Horseman combined sweetly with a one-two, taking the ball to the edge of Bedford's half. Horseman then chipped over the defence to Holifield but the ball was touched by a Bedford hand. The referee blew immediately with Holifield standing with the ball at his feet and only Peacock to beat — an obvious case for advantage.

The second decision came a couple of minutes later. Holifield was brought down by Skinn inside the penalty area but although almost everyone at Loakes Park bellowed 'Penalty!' the referee adamantly refused. Both decisions had to be made in a second — both could have gone either way.

This second half was much improved on the first 45 minutes. With the crowd in full voice both sides pressed strongly although Wycombe always did most of the attacking. Horseman had a good chance when Bedford's off-side trap for once failed but the ball bounced unkindly and the shot was blocked. Then Peacock cut out a dangerous cross from Holifield at full stretch.

In the 83rd minute, Alexander replaced Anthony up front with instructions from the bench to get forward at all costs.

With only two minutes left, Horseman played a lovely through ball over the defence to Alex, who ran into space well. Bedford could only watch as he raced on and lined up a shot from 15 yards, faced only by Peacock. The drive looked good as it beat the goalkeeper, but it finished up a few inches the wrong side of the post and Wycombe's last chance of the game went with it.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; D. Bullock, K. Mead, J. Delaney, P. Birdseye; M. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, D. Evans, G. Anthony (sub. D. Alexander 83 mins.).

BEDFORD: R. Peacock; D. Skinn, T. Gould, N. Cooley, R. Folds; P. Hawkins, L. Markham, G. Burdett, D. Earl; G. Sargent, P. Phillips. Sub. J. Campbell (not used).

Referee: A. Robinson (Portsmouth).
Official paying attendance: 4,100.